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ABSTRACT

A survey of 112 regular classroom teachers (primary-junior high) examined their attitudes toward mainstreaming handicapped students. The majority of teachers had a favorable attitude towards mainstreaming and expressed the need for inservice training and supportive assistance, but stated less desire for participation in the individualized education program planning for mainstreamed students. Respondents cited the need for limiting numbers of mainstreamed students and were divided about academic and self concept expectations for them. Other results included that 63% of experienced teachers said regular students did not ridicule their mainstreamed peers; the same percentage of all teachers believed mainstreaming would help nonhandicapped children understand their handicapped peers; and the majority indicated the importance of preparing regular students for mainstreaming. (CL)

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MAINSTREAMING TEACHERS FAVOR MAINSTREAMING

by

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July 15, 1982

Passage of PL 94-142 in 1975 established the legal responsibility for school districts to provide the "least restrictive environment" for all handicapped children. The regular classroom teacher is increasingly playing a major role in providing a least restrictive environment via mainstreaming. Therefore, teachers' qualifications and their attitudes toward mainstreaming can have significance on the success of special children in regular classrooms.

A survey of 112 Chicago suburban teachers was made to determine: 1) their attitudes toward mainstreaming, 2) their opinions on the effects on mainstreamed students, and 3) their views on the reaction of regular students to mainstreamed students. Seventy-three percent have mainstreamed classes and 27% have no mainstreaming experience. Thirty-three percent were primary teachers, 35% intermediate and 32% junior high teachers.

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The data in Table 1 show the majority of teachers had a favorable attitude toward mainstreaming by stating they would accept special children in their classroom given the option. The majority felt the need for inservice training, supportive assistance from special education teachers, and, to lessor degree, participation in the IEP planning for mainstreamed students. A number of teachers stated,

> "The success of the program depends on the 'working togetherness' of the classroom teacher and the supportive assistance or cooperation of the special education teacher. I then feel qualified."

But they balked at being involved in developing the IEP.

> "Classroom teachers don't have the time to participate in planning the IEP's."
>
> "Classroom teachers should know the contents of the IEP's but should not participate in writing them."

A significant number of teachers, across experience and grade level, believed the number of children mainstreamed into a class should be limited, since most teachers feel that mainstreaming requires considerable additional planning and instructional time. A majority believed there is a problem mainstreaming too many children who are not ready for the regular classroom. Their comments support these views:

> "The number mainstreamed should not be a serious problem as long as the learning process can take place and other students are not affected."
>
> "Class size must be small (17 to 25 pupils) for a teacher to be successful with mainstreaming."
>
> "Children mainstreamed should be counted in the class load (not added in later)."

While others felt mainstreaming reduced classroom scheduling flexibility.

> "In a self-contained classroom, scheduling can normally be flexible. However, with mainstreaming, I'm greatly limited as to how scheduled my day must be. I have to stick quite rigidly to a scheduled time for each subject. No spur of the minute changes can be made to adapt to the needs and interests of the regular class."

Most teachers (87%) stated teacher attitude was significant, neither should (64%) the mainstreamed student be given special treatment. As several teachers commented,

> "My experiences to date have been quite positive. I am pleased with the children overall, as I was quite apprehensive in the beginning. I treat the mainstreamed like any other student in my room, with good results for all."
>
> "No problems - the four BD students I have respond to discipline and humor just as any other child (consistent and fair discipline and expectations seem to be the answer)."

On the issue of how much special children would benefit from mainstreaming, a significant number (44%) of teachers did not have high expectations of success for the mainstreamed child, and the academic advantages of mainstreaming elicited a divided (39% yes, 25% no) response with no significant majority. They were also undecided (56%) whether a special child made greater academic gains in a self-contained class and undecided (49%) on whether they felt more comfortable and accepted in a self-contained special education class. The one significant positive response (60%) related to mainstreaming being socially advantageous to the special child. Only the experienced teachers (67%) saw the social advantage; inexperienced teachers (50%) were undecided. Although the total sample was divided on mainstreaming's effect on self-concept, 49% of the experienced teachers felt it would, while 70% of inexperienced teachers were undecided. Also a significant percentage of junior high teachers felt mainstreaming would enhance self-concept (43%) and academic achievement (46%) of special children, while primary and intermediate teachers were divided on the issues. Most teacher's viewed mainstreaming as beneficial: They commented,

> "Mainstreaming is a good idea socially and motivationally, but a 'one on one' is also necessary."

> "I think mainstreaming is very good socially and academically and would never say no to having a special education student in my classroom at any time."

A minority of teachers felt children could be cruel to children who are different,

> "Self-concept could be destroyed by mainstreaming through peer contact. In a self-contained class the child would feel more secure and accepted."

On the effects of mainstreaming on students' reaction, 55% of experienced teachers said regular students gave supportive help to special children. Neither did they (63%) believe regular students ridiculed their mainstreamed peers. Inexperienced teachers were undecided, 67% and 73% respectively, on these issues. Fifty percent of junior high teacher disagreed that the regular students would not be sympathetic toward the special children, while the total

majority and experienced and inexperienced teachers were undecided. Sixty-three percent of all teachers believed mainstreaming would help other children understand handicapped children better. Experienced intermediate grade teachers (46%) did not feel that special children would disrupt classroom routine, while inexperienced and other grade level teachers were divided on the question. In their written comments, teachers made a distinction between well behaved and disruptive children. Teachers' experiences have been different with similar children.

> "My sympathy is towards a 'special child', but I do not have the skill to handle a disruptive child."
>
> "Mainstreaming may have its merits in some cases but with a BD or severely handicapped child I'm totally against it."
>
> "My experience has been with children from BD classes so it has been difficult. Also, they have come from a classroom outside of the district and there was no help from AERO (regional cooperative)."
>
> "The hearing-impaired children I have had in my classroom have grown and learned with a positive attitude. Working with the HI teachers has helped a great deal. I have gained more insight as a teacher."
>
> "I have worked only with deaf mainstreamed children who were seated with 'normal' children in an art class. The two groups ignored each other; they didn't share, exchange looks at each other - nothing to indicate cooperation or friendliness."

There was a concensus that teachers should prepare regular students to receive (73%) and foster positive relations (92%) toward special students. They wrote,

> "The success of mainstreaming depends upon proper teacher preparation in both skills and attitudes."
>
> "The teacher will have to have a positive attitude and instill it in her class."

Fifty seven percent agreed that students attitudes toward children who are different reflect those of teachers . . .

> "But children also get many attitudes from home."

The findings of this study suggest that teachers are receptive to mainstreaming as several teachers expressed it,

> "We would be doing a disservice to both the regular and special child if we did not mainstream. I am in favor of mainstreaming."

But mainstreaming should not be attempted without adequate preparation for teachers and students. If mainstreaming is to be successful, teachers must have positive attitudes and be dedicated to the program. Therefore, school districts should make a concerted effort to make the teachers feel comfortable about mainstreaming and qualified to do a good job. There should be close cooperation between special teachers and classroom teachers, with supportive assistance available to the classroom teacher as necessary. Consideration should be given to more planning and conference time for teachers involved in the mainstreaming program, especially if classroom teachers are to participate in planning and implementing the IEP's. And class sizes should be reduced to allow the teacher more time to work with special children.

There should be adequate preparation for regular classroom students and handicapped children who are to be integrated in the mainstreaming program. And careful consideration should be given to each child who is to be mainstreamed to determine his readiness for integration into the regular classroom, without violating his rights to an education in the "least restrictive environment."

TABLE I

RESPONSES TO MAINSTREAMING OPINIONNAIRE

A. AGREE B. UNDECIDED C. DISAGREE

N = 112

	A	B	C
1. You understand the concept of mainstreaming.	104 93%*	5 4%	3 3%
2. You feel qualified to meet the needs of a mainstreamed child in your classroom without supportive assistance.	13 12%	33 29%	66 59%*
3. Classroom teachers should receive special training before a special child is placed in the classroom.	77 69%*	24 21%	11 10%
4. You would attend special classes or inservice training on mainstreaming if offered without charge by Dist. 123.	76 68%*	24 21%	12 11%
5. Given a choice of accepting or rejecting, you would accept a mainstreamed child in your class.	67 60%*	33 29%	12 11%
6. The special education teacher should work with the classroom teacher in planning for the mainstreamed child.	108 96%*	4 4%	0 0%
7. Classroom teachers should participate in planning the Individualized Education Program (IEP).	55 49%*	37 33%	20 18%
8. The number of special children mainstreamed in a regular classroom should be limited.	108 96%*	4 4%	0 0%
9. Mainstreaming requires considerable, additional planning time by the classroom teacher.	72 64%*	13 12%	27 24%
10. Mainstreaming requires a disproportionate amount of instructional time devoted to one child.	54 48%*	29 26%	29 26%
11. Mainstreaming takes instructional time away from regular classroom students.	61 54%*	21 19%	30 27%
12. There is danger of mainstreaming too many children who are not ready for the regular classroom.	88 78%*	20 18%	4 4%
13. The mainstreamed child should be treated as a special person by the classroom teacher.	13 12%	27 24%	72 64%*
14. Attitudes of the classroom teacher help determine the success or failure of mainstreaming.	98 87%*	10 9%	4 4%
15. The classroom teacher should have high expectations of success for the mainstreamed child.	26 23%	37 33%	49 44%*
16. A special child makes greater academic gains in a self-contained special education class than in a mainstreamed environment.	26 23%	63 56%*	23 21%
17. A special child feels more comfortable and accepted in a self-contained special education class.	34 30%	55 49%*	23 21%
18. Mainstreaming is socially advantageous to the special child.	67 60%*	31 28%	14 12%
19. Mainstreaming is academically advantageous to the special child.	44 39%	40 36%	28 25%
20. The mainstreamed child develops a better self-concept than the child in a self-contained special classroom.	46 41%	48 43%	18 16%
21. A mainstreamed child disrupts the regular routine of the classroom.	33 29%	37 33%	42 38%
22. The classroom teacher should prepare the students to receive a mainstreamed child.	82 73%*	17 15%	13 12%
23. The classroom teacher can foster positive relations between the special child and regular students.	103 92%*	4 4%	5 4%
24. Attitudes of students toward mainstreamed children reflect the attitudes of the classroom teachers.	64 57%*	22 20%	26 23%
25. Mainstreaming helps make children more understanding of those with special problems.	71 63%*	27 24%	14 13%
26. Regular classroom children tend to ridicule a mainstreamed child.	16 14%	39 35%	57 51%*
27. Regular classroom children tend to feel sympathetic toward a special child.	28 25%	51 46%*	33 29%
28. Regular classroom children offer supportive help to a special child.	54 48%*	43 38%	15 14%

*Significant at the .05 level of confidence.